

KNOTTS ISLAND



Salt Works Center



During the Civil War, salt—essential for the preservation of meat—was vitally important to the massive Union and Confederate armies. Currituck County's location was ideal for salt works, and Knotts Island's residents made salt both here and across the sound on the Outer Banks. Local resident Henry Ansell wrote of accompanying his uncle, John Beasley, to recover two salt pans that a storm had buried and later uncovered. Beasley claimed that he had boiled salt under the island's cedar trees since the War of 1812. Federal raids targeted Southern salt works such as those here. Jonathan Worth, State Salt Commissioner,



Plan of saltworks, from *Salt: That Necessary Article* (1973)

Navy Lt. William N. Jeffers, commander of USS *Underwriter*, wrote, "The ultimate destination of this force was to the destruction of some salt works, said near Old Currituck Inlet." After talking to residents on both sides of the sound, however, he decided that "the capacity of salt-making establishments had been greatly exaggerated; in fact, that no works exist. A few sheds and hovels sheltered some kettles in which the people make a small supply, principally for their own use." Because many salt works were small,

wrote in 1862, "The taking of Roanoke island will cut off Salt making in Currituck ... the best place yet discovered on our Coast for making Salt."

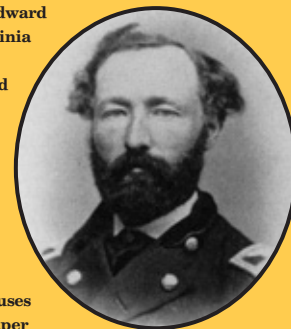
In February 1862, U.S. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's expedition occupied the Outer Banks. U.S.

family-operated enterprises rather than large factories, Jeffers probably underestimated their effect. Confederate prisoners who escaped from the transport *Maple Leaf* in 1863 noted salt works here. Other salt works were established in Carteret County (then destroyed by the Federals) and in New Hanover County.



View of saltworks, *Harper's Weekly*, January 14, 1865

In December 1863, Union Gen. Edward Wild led an expedition from Virginia into Currituck County. He took hostages in retaliation for alleged Confederate mistreatment of Federal prisoners and ordered that houses of Confederate "guerillas" be destroyed. Union Col. Alonzo G. Draper burned several dwellings here on Knotts Island including that of William White. When White's wife told Draper that "there will be no houses left standing on this island," Draper deduced that she was threatening Unionists' houses. He was dissuaded from taking her prisoner because she was about to give birth. He took



Col. Alonzo G. Draper
Courtesy U.S. Army Military
History Institute

her daughter, 23-year-old Nancy White, instead, and transported her to Pongo Bridge, Va., where he got in a jurisdictional dispute with Lt. Col. Frederick F. Wead. Words were exchanged, Wead filed charges against Draper, and a court martial was held. On January 16, 1864, Gen. Benjamin F. Butler settled the case, and soon released Nancy White. Her grave is a mile south of here.